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Asian studies were and still are a blessing for the methodological disciplines. Thanks to the URPP, these connections are now well established for the future. For students and PhD candidates in methodological disciplines, they impose high standards in terms of language skills and intimate knowledge of the regions. At the same time, these close connections also mean for students and PhD candidates in the field of Asian studies that they are continuously working on methodological-theoretical questions. To hark back to the URPP Asia and Europe, I was impressed by the fact that great emphasis was placed on linguistic competence when selecting junior researchers, even in awarding funding to PhD candidates of methodological disciplines. This seems important to me, because we work so closely with colleagues from all over Asia that a high level of language competence should no longer be negotiable even for anthropologists. Fortunately, the URPP was relentless in this point. Accordingly, the level of discussion was on a high level—but so were the demands. I sincerely hope that this orientation can now be maintained thanks to the continuation of the Doctoral Program Asia and Europe.

David Chiavacci: Apart from all the achievements in research, the successfully acquired third-party funding, and the countless new ideas and impulses that all members got, it must be re-emphasized that the URPP Asia and Europe was a means of promoting junior researchers par excellence. Former junior members of the URPP are now holding professorial chairs in Basel, Hamburg, Paris, or Edmonton. And we can be very confident that the number of former URPP's junior researchers appointed to chairs will continue to rise in the future. Like no other institution, the URPP brought excellent junior researchers from all over the world to Zurich in order to send them back into the world from Zurich.

Arab Feminism

The international workshop “Feminism and Theory in the Arab World” (March 18–19, 2016) aimed at strengthening the cooperation and exchange not only between gender scholars in Switzerland and their counterparts in the Arabic-speaking countries, but also between Arab researchers themselves. The six speakers presented research on five Arabic-speaking countries in North Africa and the Middle East, while extended panel discussions on both days of the workshop brought the speakers into dialogue with each other and with researchers from Switzerland. The workshop was jointly organized by the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, the URPP Asia and Europe, and the Swiss Society for Gender Studies.

Ulrich Brandenburg

The first day of the workshop opened with welcoming, introductory remarks by the head of the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies (IAOS) Angelika Malinar, as well as the workshop's organizers, Bettina Dennerlein and Yasmine Berriane. Malinar stressed how interplay between the global entanglements of feminist concerns and their local contexts was vitally important to feminist scholars and activists. Dennerlein and Berriane highlighted that it was impossible to separate feminist theory from political feminism. Instead, the workshop intended to examine the relevance of theory in a climate of political upheaval in the Arab world and, by the use of theory, go beyond the ideological fault lines in the field.

As the workshop's first speaker, Marnia Lazreg (City University of New York) introduced her concept of the “median space” for Arab feminism, which she laid out with reference to the situation of women in Algeria. The median space in the conception of Lazreg would mark the convergence of femi-

nist theory and the actual empowerment of Arab women. Lazreg's concern was especially how to reclaim the value of freedom for Arab feminists against a form of cultural relativism which was used to deny Arab women equality with women in Western countries. Sketching the unequal relationship between feminist movements in the West and in the Middle East, she described the emergence of Arab feminism as a derivative discourse, serving first as a projection for Western feminists' universalist claims and later being relegated into the realm of cultural difference. The remedy would be for Arab feminists to improve on Western gender theory by adapting it to their local concerns.

Feminism between the Arab World and Switzerland

The next speaker was Fatima Sadiqi (University of Fez), who also taught as a visiting researcher at the IAOS in the 2016 fall semester. Sadiqi described the situation of feminism in Morocco between the two extremes of Westernist secularism and resurgent Islamism. She envisaged feminist concerns as having to occupy a center position, bridging the antagonism and contributing to the creation of an egalitarian society in Morocco. The third speaker was Amel Grami (Manouba University), who approached feminist concerns from another direction and addressed the phenomenon of male feminism in Tunisia. She detected two main trends in male support for the feminist movement: men who see their support for the women's movement as part of modernism and progressivism and others who detect a chance of achieving social justice and even redefining traditional masculinity. As the first day's final speaker, Zeina Zaatari (UC Davis) addressed feminism in Lebanon, identifying intersectionality as being at the heart of the most recent struggle for women's rights. In states preoccupied with the “war on terror,”

spaces for women are curtailed and citizenship rights have become a daily concern. What is necessary, according to Zaatari, is thus mutual awareness and cooperation between different civil society actors against various forms of discrimination.

The first day of the workshop concluded with a roundtable on the topic of "Women's and Gender Studies in Arab and Swiss Universities." It was moderated by Bettina Dennerlein, with the participation of Hoda Elsadda (Cairo University), Amel Grami, Fatima Sadiqi, Marylène Lieber (University of Geneva), and Regina Wecker (University of Basel). The discussion revolved around the term and concept of gender and the current situation of academic feminism. The participants laid out interesting details about their career paths and personal motivations to do gender studies, as well as the trajectory of gender studies at the participants' respective universities. What became clear during the discussion are the enormous achievements that these pioneers of Gender Studies have accomplished during the last twenty to thirty years, making Gender Studies from a fringe concern into an established, though not uncontested, field of research and teaching. At the same time it was astonishing to see the commonalities and parallels between the different Arab countries and Switzerland, and that it is not necessarily Switzerland as

part of the so-called West which is at the forefront of progress. Instead, the interest in Gender Studies was in both cases triggered especially by developments in Anglo-Saxon academia, as can also be seen by the difficulties of rendering the term "gender" not only into Arabic but also into German. The discussions gave thus renewed cause to question the established boundaries between a "progressive," "pro-feminist" West and a "traditional" and "backward" Arab world.

Universalism in women's rights

On the second day of the workshop, Hoda Elsadda spoke about post-revolutionary Egypt, discussing the drawing process for the constitution of 2014. After the Islamist-inspired constitution of 2012 had taken steps to undermine women's rights, the constitution of 2014 reinstated the principle of equality between men and women. One important lever to achieve this was the open discussion about the issue of sexual harassment in Egypt since 2013 and the ensuing concerns for the international image of Egypt. This served as an example of how rights activists could employ international norms and the language of women's rights in local power struggles, disproving the claims of cultural relativists.

The last speaker was Raja Rhouni (University of El Jadida), who talked about the work of the Moroccan femi-

nist Fatema Mernissi and her impact on feminist discourse. Mernissi strove for the liberation of Moroccan women as an indigenous project, demystifying the Orientalist idea of the seclusion of women in Muslim majority societies. Women's rights in Mernissi's writings were shown not to be a problem for Islam itself but only for the male Muslim elite. Mernissi also established the concept of Islamic feminism by reappropriating Islam for women's rights and actively engaging in a struggle with the Islamist challenge about the meaning of Islam.

The workshop ended with a final discussion about the workshop's results, which was initiated by the discussants Nadia Al-Baghdadi (Central European University) and Katrin Meyer (University of Basel). Points of discussion concerned especially the notion of universalism in women's rights and the relationship between feminist theory and the concrete challenges of local contexts. A question which was unfortunately only lightly touched upon concerned the questionable notion of the "Arab World." One wonders about the usefulness of this Arab framework in view of the following points: 1) several papers preferred to describe the region not as Arab, but as a distinctly Muslim MENA; 2) the Arabian Peninsula was largely left out of the picture, with frequent reference instead to developments in Iran; and 3) a noticeable gap existed between Arab scholarship in Arabic and in English or French.

Nonetheless, the benefits of this workshop about the Arab world are obvious in having brought together eminent scholars from different Arab countries, who have not been directly in debate with each other even though they share similar concerns. It was also a reminder that feminist concerns should not be overshadowed by culturalist visions, and that frequent talk about the "West" and the "non-West" can never be left unquestioned.



Public roundtable discussion on "Women's and Gender Studies in Arab and Swiss Universities," March 18, 2016